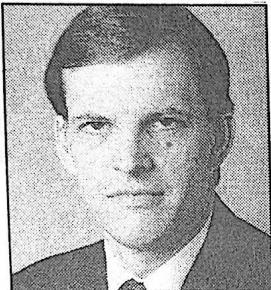


INQUIRY

Topic: LITHUANIA'S PLIGHT

Victor Nakas, 36, is the Washington branch manager of the Lithuanian Information Center, headquartered in Brooklyn, N.Y. The Lithuanian-American organization serves as a clearinghouse for information about events occurring inside Lithuania as well as about how congressional measures affect Lithuania. Nakas was interviewed by USA TODAY's **Barbara Reynolds**.



Rebecca Hammel Photography
Victor Nakas

Hands-off policy will make things worse

USA TODAY: How did the Lithuanian-American community receive President Bush's decision not to take action against Soviet pressure on Lithuania?

NAKAS: The Lithuanian-American community is outraged and appalled by the president's actions. It's going to contribute to the crisis in Lithuania, not help resolve it.

USA TODAY: You don't accept the president's view that sanctions could harden Mos-

cow's position against Lithuania?

NAKAS: The Bush administration has taken a hands-off policy on Lithuania since Lithuania declared its independence on March 11. That has not deterred the Soviets from escalating the confrontation, and it's hard to see how the president's continued adherence to this do-nothing policy is going to contribute to resolving the crisis. The president is doing exactly what the Soviets want him to do. Essentially by

doing nothing Tuesday, he is telling Gorbachev he has a free hand in Lithuania.

USA TODAY: What would you like to see the president do to help Lithuania?

NAKAS: He should have told the Soviets that they would not be allowed to have observer status at the international trade talks; that the United States was putting on hold the U.S.-Soviet commercial agreement; that the United States would not be granting "most favored nation status" to the Soviet Union. In addition to these economic sanctions, the president should have given some consideration to Congressman Dante Fascell's suggestion over the weekend that the arms summit be delayed or postponed.

USA TODAY: The Soviets have cut off most of the gas and oil exports and rail service to Lithuania, and have frozen assets. What impact has all this had?

NAKAS: It is leading to the closing of factories which depend on fuel sources. That means thousands of workers are being idled. It means that the transportation system is grinding to a halt. People are limited to about seven or eight gallons of gasoline a month, so it's much more difficult to get around. And the situation is only going to get worse.

USA TODAY: How much worse?

NAKAS: Lithuania grows enough food to feed itself and to export to the Soviet Union. However, Lithuanian agricul-

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ture is mechanized. It needs fuel sources to do the spring planting and to do the harvest in the autumn. If this fuel continues to be cut off, then Lithuanians face the prospect of food shortages.

USA TODAY: Couldn't things dramatically change if President Vytautas Landsbergis would compromise with Gorbachev?

NAKAS: It's the Soviet Union which has refused to negotiate. They want the Lithuanians to surrender completely. They want the Lithuanians to rescind their declaration of independence. And the Lithuanians cannot do that.

USA TODAY: Hasn't Estonia found a way to negotiate an independence model which Lithuania could imitate?

NAKAS: Estonia said it was going to take a slower path to independence, but after that

declaration was made, Gorbachev called the leader of the Estonian Parliament and warned him, "If you dare to take these kinds of measures, I'm going to do the same thing to you that I'm doing to Lithuania." The message behind this is: It doesn't matter whether you go slowly or go quickly, you still get resistance from Moscow.

USA TODAY: Are reports true that the Lithuanian prime minister, Kazimiera Prunskiene, can't get a visa to enter the USA?

NAKAS: The question of her visa has been postponed until the end of the Bush-Gorbachev summit. That's what she, herself, indicated in a press conference. That is another sign of weakness on the part of the Bush administration. It's sending again the signal to the Soviets that Lithuania really doesn't matter to President Bush.